

Off Course and Headed Overboard



Navy photo by JO2 Zack Baddorf

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I had survived a grueling six-month deployment without incurring a single scratch on my body. In the blink of an eye, though, with less than a week back in homeport, I nearly died in a shipboard mishap.

We had a lot of stores needing to come aboard ship from the pier, so I checked out a forklift and drove down to the quarterdeck ramp. I noticed a difference this time. In place of a ramp angling down to the pier, like we normally used, was one with an arch—necessary because we were berthed at a double-deck pier.

I should have used a little ORM on this new ramp and the possible problems involved. Instead, I started down the arched ramp backward, as I always did. With help from the spotters, I was able to maneuver my way toward the crest of the arch. I couldn't see the spotter down at the pier once I reached the arch's crest, however, and subsequently lost situational awareness and veered off course. The forklift's tines went over the ramp's rails [see *damage in accompanying photo*].

My quick reaction after seeing what was happening saved me from falling over the side with the



forklift, which almost certainly would have killed me.

This incident taught me a vital lesson: No matter what your level of expertise is, you never should take anything for granted. A split-second mistake can turn into irreparable damage. Always carefully examine the environment before starting any activity, then reexamine the setting throughout the course of the event to make sure nothing has changed.

Remain safety conscious at all times, regardless of the pressures that exist. Mishaps can happen to anyone—even the most vigilant people. 🚫

For more info, go to: <http://safetycenter.navy.mil/safetips/a-m/forklifts.htm>.